

## New Forest Remembers WWII Project

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Project information:

[www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii)

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*Ann, whereabouts in the Forest were you living during the war?*

We lived on the edge of the village of Bransgore.

*And how old were you when the war started?*

In 1939 I was almost three [laughs].

*So you grew up during the war. Tell me about your father.*

My father was the village baker, he was a Master Baker and ran the bakery and grocery shop. He, during the war, he worked all night until about six O'clock in the morning when he was able to get a few hours sleep before delivering the bread. He was exempt from joining the forces and going to war because he was in, what was called an 'essential business', I think helping to keep the local community fed [laughs]. He was also what was know as a corn and meal man this meant he sold hundred weight sacks of corn for chicken feed and meal, which was a cereal type of food, for pigs. A hundred weight was a hundred and twelve pounds, which today would be about fifty kilogrammes. One of his customers one day offered him a piglet, from one of his pig's litters. She became quite a pet at home and my young sister named her Sylvia, after a girl who worked in the shop with my mother, but one day, the pig Sylvia wondered in to the house and was found in the kitchen we, as

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CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

children found it quite funny but I don't think my mother was amused [laughs].

**00:01.56**

- Father master baker
- 'essential business'

Potato peelings and other vegetable peelings were all boiled up in a large saucepan with the pig meal added later as food for the pig and it was a horrible smell these peelings made whilst cooking. When the pig had been fattened up, she was returned to the farmer for slaughter before coming back to us as pork and bacon etc. and I remember my father turning the chitlings inside out, these were the pig's small intestines, which were cooked and eaten as food, I believe, a delicacy but my father was probably the only person who enjoyed them and I'm sure I didn't have any! [laughs]

*You mentioned your mother was busy, but she also had another job, did she?*

My mother, well, she had four children to look after, but she ran the shop, she ran the grocery side of the business. Oh I remember one day, she was on the 'phone to an official, I think probably from the Ministry of Food, complaining she hadn't been sent enough bacon to enable her to serve all her customers. She probably hadn't sent in enough coupons from the ration books to warrant more bacon. But sides of bacon were delivered which then had to be cut up and a slicing machine was used to make rashers. I say, food of course was rationed and coupons from the books had to be collected and sent to the relevant ministry departments. The sides of bacon, I remember, being carried into the shop from a large lorry and slung over the deliveryman's shoulder [giggles], which was quite a sight. Margarine was also delivered to the shop in a large box and had to be cut out separately for each customer, weighed and wrapped in greaseproof paper. The same applied to cheese, which came in a large round block. This was cut in half and then in smaller sections with a cheese wire. This was a especially strong piece of wire with handles each end to enable the wire to be pulled through the cheese. Sugar was also delivered in especially strong sacks and had to be scooped out into smaller bags and weighed and these small bags were made of a special strong type of paper, very thick and coloured blue and it did have a name but I'm afraid I can't remember what it was called.

**00:04.42**

- peelings to feed the animals
- contact with the Ministry of Food
- Coupons
- Bacon/ margarine/ cheese/ sugar deliveries

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*What about vegetables?*

I think we were quite fortunate in that we had quite a productive garden, although it couldn't be considered large, and at one time, I remember my father having an allotment so we were able to have our own vegetables: potatoes, runner beans, Brussels sprouts, peas and carrots. We also kept chickens, which kept us supplied with eggs, we were able to have eggs for breakfast every morning, either fried, boiled or scrambled. My favourite breakfast food was fried bread with marmalade. My mother's favourite was toast spread with 'dripping', fat from a roast joint. We always seemed to have a basin full in the walk-in larder, which had a marble shelf to keep everything cold, no refrigeration in those days. If the chickens produced more eggs than could be used, they were preserved in a lidded galvanised bucket filled with something called 'Isinglass'. This was a transparent gelatinous liquid which preserved the eggs, which were then taken out as and when required, particularly for cake making.

- Vegetable gardens
- Keeping chickens
- Isinglass for preserving

*How aware were you that there was a war going on as you grew up?*

I think I was too young to understand the true concept of war. But as a very young girl, I remember being carried downstairs from my bed to be seated in the cupboard under the stairs, it was quite a large cupboard, walk-in cupboard, and this was presumably as a result of an air raid warning. My two brothers were also there, my baby sister who was laid in the washing basket on a shelf in the cupboard. This shelf normally held Kilner jars of fruit, preserved plums or tomatoes and home made jams and chutneys. My mother stayed with us, my father having brought the children downstairs, then returned to the bake house which was across the yard from the house where, as I've said, he worked all night baking bread. And I suppose we stayed there until the all clear was sounded. One evening I can remember that there was a knock at the front door and a policeman was there to tell my mother that there was a chink of light showing through the door, we did have a blackout curtain at the door but obviously it hadn't closed correctly and of course, we weren't allowed to show any light from the house at all. There was a small American airbase at the back of our house. The 'planes would come in to land low over our chimneys. One day a 'plane did crash in the field and my mother was very concerned because my younger brother and his friend had gone across to the edge of the field to watch the 'planes. Fortunately, both boys returned home safely but a cow was killed, because the field was next to a farm. The American airmen would come into the shop where my baby sister would be lying or sitting in the washing basket at the end of the counter and apparently they used to say they'd come back to her when she was older, she was a very pretty baby, tanned from the sun and with dark curly hair [laughs]. My father told us on one occasion when he was delivering

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bread in Purewell the streets were empty, there were no military vehicles about and the area was eerily quiet. He delivered his bread to a customer and continued down to Stanpit but on the return journey, he had a dreadful shock 'cause he realised that where he'd been standing a few minutes earlier, there was now a small crater in the front of the house.

- Air raids in the cupboard under the stairs
- Police visit regarding a chink of light showing
- American airbase

*Do you, do you remember at all how you managed for clothes?*

Well, clothes, of course, were rationed and as children, I think we had two of everything. We had two vests, two pairs of pants, two shirts, blouses and whatever, one was in the wash and we wore the other one for a week [laughs].

**00:09.19**

All the washing, of course, had to be done by hand and hung out on the line to dry, even in very cold weather, very often in the winter, it would freeze. I remember being asked to take washing off the line but it was stiff as a board [laughs] and but to dry the washing off, it was placed on a clothes horse in front of the fire, which was either coal fire or log fire we used to get truck loads of logs delivered and left in the yard at the back of the house. My mother bought wool, pure wool, no nylon or synthetic material which was knitted up using four needles to get the round shape into socks for my father and brothers. These were warm but wore thin at the heel and a hole would develop. These holes were then darned with wool using a wooden 'mushroom' which was the shape of the heel of the sock to enable the socks to be warm for longer. Jumpers and cardigans for the girls and pullovers for the boys were also hand knitted. It was difficult for me to have new shoes because my mother had great problems because I had wide feet and high insteps and shoes, girls' shoes particularly with a strap and a button wouldn't fasten across my foot and the laces from a girl's lace up shoe wouldn't tie so the answer...boys' lace up shoes! But I don't think anybody knew any different really [laughs].

**00:11.13**

- Clothes rations
- Washing regimes
- Hand knitting and darning

*Do you have any other childhood memories that we can record?*

Going to school [yes] I remember being asked to take or being asked to collect acorns and

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take them to the school where they were collected and this was to provide food for pigs and we also collected rose hips and these were made into rose hip syrup which I think was possibly a vitamin C or something but I can't remember what it was. On one occasion, all children were asked to take their gas masks into school and these were, these had been provided in a cardboard box, in individual boxes with long cord handle for carrying. Each child in school was given milk to drink at morning break time and the bottles, they were glass bottles, just a third of a pint and I think we drank out of them with a straw. The bottle tops on those bottles were made of a very thin card, I think the top layer may have been waxed. We used to use cardboard bottle tops for making pom poms out of odd pieces of wool [laughs] to hang on baby's pram or something like that.

- Collecting acorns and rose hips to take to school
- Gas masks in school
- Milk provisions

*Were there any sweets or special treats?*

There was a newsagent, come sweetshop, near the, near the shop and we used to be able to take our tokens from our ration books to the shop where we could buy some sweets, they would have been very cheap probably, a penny or tuppence or something in old pence.

*And Christmas time, what was Christmas time like?*

Oh, Christmas time was very nice, as I say; with four children we made our own entertainment. We always hung up our stocking, but it wasn't a stocking, it was one of my father's socks but my mother always told us that a pillow case wasn't nearly so much fun 'cause you opened it and you saw what was inside whereas with his large sock, long sock you could put your hand in and pull out all sorts of treats. And we always had an orange, a walnut, oh there was a third thing but I can't remember but we had those regularly, every, every year. But we made our own decorations for hanging round the room, we could buy coloured strips of paper which we linked to each other, glued each one into a circle and then, to make a chain and the finished chain was then strung across the room from corner to corner, brightened up the room. We were fortunate too, in that my father was friendly with the local gamekeeper who always got us a very large Christmas tree, which we [laughs] enjoyed decorating so we were quite fortunate really.

**00:14.46**

And one Christmas I was given some furniture for my dolls' house that had been made by a local carpenter for me and my little sister. But the furniture was a three piece suite, a two-

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seater settee and two armchairs and these had been made from matchboxes and covered in a thin layer of cotton wool to make padded arms and then covered in a lovely deep blue silky material. And I thought they were absolutely fantastic. They're still in the dolls' house today in 2012, so [laughs] they work very well. And another Christmas I remember, we had a parcel from a friend of my mother who lived in Canada, she married a Canadian soldier and then moved abroad. There was a fur pixie hood for my sister and me and what looked like a bar of white chocolate. This was hard and waxy and we decided it wasn't edible but we didn't know what it was for. It transpired it was cocoa butter which was for moisturising the skin [laughs].

- Christmas time, decorations

*Thank you very much Ann for sharing your memories.*

A pleasure, thank you very much

**Keywords:**

master baker  
essential business  
peelings to feed the animals  
Ministry of Food  
Coupons  
Bacon/ margarine/ cheese/ sugar deliveries  
Vegetable gardens  
Keeping chickens  
Isinglass for preserving  
Air raids  
Police visit regarding a chink of light showing  
American airbase  
Clothes rations  
Washing regimes  
Hand knitting and darning  
Collecting acorns and rose hips to take to school  
Gas masks in school  
Milk provisions  
Christmas time  
Decorations

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There's one other thing I do remember and that is when we were quite small and we'd been downstairs, whether we'd been in the cupboard under the stairs, I'm not sure, but my mother took us outside the back door in the pitch black, of course, and we watched this line of 'planes going across, I don't know how many, six, seven, quite a long line I remember, and the drone, the drone of those 'planes going over, I can hear it today, if I'm at a show or hear 'planes being demonstrated somewhere, and I hear that 'plane, I can hear it again and it brings back that picture to mind.

- Sound of the 'planes droning

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